



SURVIVORS

after suicide

A Program of Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center

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A Spiritual Journey of Healing After Suicide

Lauren Schneider
Oak Park, California

and confusion around his suicide forced me to commit to a path of recovery and healing. Rob's death has been a horrific tragedy and a spiritual awakening.

To explain this spiritual journey, I have to go back prior to Rob's suicide. I am hesitant to write about this aspect of the experience because it is so unusual that others may not be able to relate at all.

Yet, the experience of death, especially so violent and heartbreaking a death, brings many of us to larger questions about the meaning of senseless death and the life of the soul. Although I do not have answers to these bigger questions, my experience around Rob's death may be relevant to open up possibilities for reflection.

Two years prior, I was told by a dear family friend that she saw that some terrible tragedy was going to happen in our family and that it would change our lives forever. This

My brother, Rob, shot himself about 18 months ago. This gunshot shattered my world. The excruciating pain

friend has proven over the years to have the gift of precognitive vision and I knew her intuition about other occurrences to be accurate. I asked her several times over the year for more detail. She could tell me nothing other than that she felt something really bad would happen to one of my family members (not my husband or children). Perhaps I needed to use this information to connect more often and intimately with my extended family, my brothers, parents and cousins. Instead, I filed her vision on a back shelf. I have remorse about this that I hope will one day be forgiven.

One night, I woke sweating from a nightmare. In the dream, two people were trying to escape a Nazi encampment. While being interrogated by the Gestapo, the male protagonist said, "It doesn't matter what you do to me, I'll be dead within a year with a bullet in my head." At the end of the dream, both the man and woman were shot in the head. I awoke gasping for breath because of the utter futility of the final image. The dream was prophetic. Eleven months later, Rob was dead from a self-inflicted gunshot to the head.

You can never really be prepared for this tragedy. Yet, I remember that along with the immediate shock and intense

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Why We Grieve Differently

Jinny Tesik, M.A.

our emotional world. This understanding is needed, especially in the grieving process.

No two people will ever grieve the same way, with the same intensity or for the same duration.

It is important to understand this basic truth. Only then can we accept our own manner of grieving and be sensitive to another's response to loss. Only then are we able to seek out the nature of support we need for our own personalized

We accept without question uniqueness in the physical world . . . fingerprints, snowflakes, etc. But we often refuse that same reality in

journey back to wholeness and be able to help others on their own journey.

Not understanding the individuality of grief could complicate and delay whatever grief we might experience from our own loss. It could also influence us, should we attempt to judge the grieving of others—even those we might most want to help.

Each of us is a unique combination of diverse past experiences. We each have a different personality, style, various way of coping with stress situations, and our own attitudes influence how we accept the circumstances around us.

Past Experience

Past experiences from childhood on have a great impact

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SAS exists to help people resolve their grief and pain in their own personal way, and to help them move forward in their lives, positively and productively.

The SAS Coordinator's Column



Carole Chasin, M.A., M.F.T.

Lois Bloom had great news for the Suicide Prevention Center recently. Her church, **The Women's Fellowship of The Neighborhood** in Palos Verdes Estates, gave a donation of \$1,000 last year, and this year they raised their gift to \$5,000! This is wonderful news—many thanks to Lois and Sam Bloom.

There are two new SAS groups. The East Los Angeles group is ready to start, and the West Valley group will be start-

ing later this year. We need volunteers to help promote the new groups through outreach to churches, hospitals, community counseling centers, mortuaries, police and fire departments, and funeral homes in the respective communities. Please call me at 310-751-5370 if you would like to volunteer.

A new leader is needed for the South Bay's monthly drop-in group. This group meets at the Little Company of Mary Hospital in the Center for Health Education Building. The building is located on Earl Street in Torrance. The group meets every third Monday from 7:30 until 9:00 pm. If you would like to lead this group, or know someone who may be interested, please call me at 310-751-5370. ♡

SPC To Participate in Hotline Effectiveness Research

Jay Nagdimon, Ph.D.
Director, Suicide Prevention Center and Emergency Services

The Suicide Prevention Center of Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center is proud to announce the selection of our Crisis Line as one of six suicide prevention hotlines nationwide to participate in a research study on crisis hotline effectiveness. The federally-funded research will be jointly conducted by Rutgers University in New Jersey, Columbia University in New York City and the American Association of Suicidology. This study will look at a wide range of outcomes and hopes to capture a broader picture of how a crisis line helps both individuals and agencies within a community.

The study's investigators are posing four questions: (1) Are there immediate benefits to a caller from calling a hotline? (2) What are the longer term (weeks/months) benefits to a caller and community from hotline utilization? (3) Are crisis hotline services equally effective for callers of different ages and gender? Given the higher rates of suicidal ideation and attempts among individuals of Spanish origin, do these callers benefit more or less from crisis hotline services than other callers? (4) Do crisis hotline services that use paid professional counselors have the same outcomes as those that use lay volunteers?

To discover the answers to these questions, the investigation will first measure decreases in caller suicidality during the call. Later, caller satisfaction will be measured. The study will investigate whether a caller has followed through on a referral for mental health treatment. With the caller's permission, the investigators will contact the referral and ask how the agency assessed the caller in terms of suicidality. The researchers will also ask the agency whether they felt

the referral was appropriate. A broad spectrum of community agencies will be polled to discover their knowledge and use of the crisis line, and whether they feel it is an important service. Callers in the study will be followed over a four-month period and their progress will be compared with suicidal people who went to an emergency room but never called a crisis hotline. This study will take place over the course of three years.

The Suicide Prevention Center is fortunate to participate in this study. The outcomes can be used to substantially enhance SPC's position when applying for funding and financial support from foundations. SPC's presence in the community will also undoubtedly increase with the added publicity. As a result I expect the call volume of the Crisis Line will increase during and after the research. While the research will involve changes in procedures, new forms and some additional work for hotline staff, the results will pay off for years to come. ♡

Lifekeepers Memory Quilt

We want the world to know our loved ones lived and deserve to be remembered. All 50 states have come together in this joint effort to educate the world for the need to reduce the incidence of suicide. The two existing quilts have been displayed at national meetings, and we are currently putting together a third. A \$20 fee covers the cost of material, labor and postage necessary to create your visual tribute.

Yes, I want to create a quilt square to honor:

Send the material and instructions to me:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number(s): _____

Enclosed is my \$20 check or money order made out to Catherine Montgomery to cover the cost of material, labor and postage.

Mail to:

C. J. Montgomery, P.O. Box 948, Redondo Beach, CA 90277
or call Catherine at 310.316.2527 for information.

A Spiritual Journey *continued from page 1*

grief, I had the feeling that my friend's prediction and the dream had graciously attempted to bolster me up to handle the reality of Rob's suicide. Those precognitions suggested that there is some order of the universe much greater than our rational minds can comprehend. With the shock, horror and despair that followed Rob's death, these thoughts have given me comfort.

There are many facets of grief. Those first feelings of disbelief were interspersed with sudden outbursts of sobbing and then numbness as I tried to continue with some normal daily routines. I wanted to stop the world and get off long enough to catch my breath. But, being already a survivor of divorce and family chaos, my *modus operandi* was to keep on going no matter how empty and meaningless it felt. Again, it seemed that an invisible force was at work through coincidental timing. Months before, I had scheduled a ten-day retreat, the first time ever to be away from children and responsibilities. It took place three weeks after Rob's suicide. A friend had to put me on the plane because it felt wrong to leave my duties. This time for myself began the journey of healing. The ten days provided a safe haven to scream and cry, meditate, reflect and hike in nature. Hiking in the mountains was the only time Rob was truly happy and it brought me closer to him.

I didn't want to come home. Reality seemed too hard and empty. I don't know how long despair had been buried in my psyche but the hopelessness that led Rob to suicide threatened to overtake me. I got scared because for the first time in my life, I could understand the act of suicide. Shortly after his death, Rob's psychiatrist said to my family that Rob would want for each of us to fulfill our lives. However, I couldn't accept that I had a life when Rob didn't. Survivor Guilt.

I am a psychotherapist and had been available for others and not enough for myself. It was my turn to heal. Although I had benefited previously, psychotherapy did not have the cure for me in this situation. I needed spiritual solace to address this despair and to heal a broken sense of family. I went to Al-Anon, a 12-step program, and found many tools and good medicine to cope with grief. The biggest tool was the prescription to take care of myself, beginning each day with meditation, lighting a candle for Rob and for hope, and making a request to the universe for healing. I broke through some of the old inhibitions and reached out for contact when feeling vulnerable. I continued to work, care for my children, and maintain my marriage. But I slowed down the pace of caring for all these responsibilities and focused on finding something each day that felt nourishing. Asking the question, "what do I need" seems terribly selfish when

someone dies, and yet it is this quest to reaffirm my own life that is so healing.

It is a general rule that one should not make any major decisions or changes for a year after the death of a loved one. I was in no condition to make decisions. Again, circumstances intervened and directed me to move my family out of the city into a quieter suburb surrounded by mountains. Nature is great food for the soul and the mountains are grounding in a tangible way.

I still carried a lot of shame about my family from childhood and now felt the stigma of suicide. In the 12 steps, I found others who had recovered from crippling trauma and shame. Almost a year went by before I participated in the eight-week group for survivors after suicide. There, I met good and loving people—parents, siblings, lovers—who had lost to suicide a child, a brother, a sister, a boyfriend, a parent. I grieved with and for them. I understood that suicide can happen in the best of families and I began to heal the stigma. I could focus less on Rob's illness and more on the simple beauty of who he had been. I continue to miss him and imagine that I always will.

Finally, I offer this perspective from years of being a dream therapist. I have observed numerous times that in dreams, we can experience a real and telepathic connection to other people or souls. There are so many examples. For instance, I have heard a dream in which a woman's deceased father comes to tell her each time someone in the family is sick or in need of help. And that of an estranged daughter who in the dream told her father she loved him and helped him to cross a bridge. The dream prompted her to go home and make peace with him just before he died. During the war, my father-in-law dreamed that his mother, four years dead, came and told him to run in the direction of an approaching army. Upon waking, he did as instructed. He believes that the spirit of his mother saved his life. In this past year and a half, I have met so many people in everyday situations who are survivors of suicide. Many share with me that they have been visited by loved ones in dreams and are comforted to see them whole and content. Still, I have not dreamed of Rob. But my eight-year-old son shared this inspirational dream: "In the dream, I am told that if you close your eyes and reach behind, an angel will hold your hand. So, I closed my eyes, and felt something gently squeeze my hand. I looked around to see a pretty little girl angel. She smiled at me and continued to hold my hand. I wondered if uncle Rob was an angel and then, there he was, smiling at me. We talked for a while. He was happy. And then I said good-by and the dream ended." I imagine that in this bigger realm of the soul, Rob still exists and is at peace. ♡

Thank you, Lauren, for sharing your spiritual journey with us.

Survivors: Help Prevent Suicide

Jay Nagdimon, Ph.D.

Director, Suicide Prevention Center and Emergency Services

Would you like the chance to prevent another family from having to lose a loved one to suicide? You can do this along with hundreds of other survivors and volunteers who will make a 45-minute walk for suicide prevention at the Alive and Running 5K/10K Walk/Run. With the weakened economy and corporate donations dropping off, this year's Alive and Running event is more important than ever.

On Sunday, September 22, 2002 you have the opportunity to make a real difference in another person's life. The funds raised will help subsidize survivors who can't afford to pay the cost of our support groups, the money will help

keep our crisis line available to callers 24-hours a day, and it will continue our suicide prevention education program for doctors, therapists, teachers and others in key professions.

If you can't attend in person, consider making a \$25 donation and placing the name of a loved one on our memorial banner or place your name among those on the Friends of the Suicide Prevention Center banner.

The Walk/Run will take place in Westchester, just North of LAX, one block West of La Tijera and Sepulveda Blvds. To request information on the memorial/Friends of SPC banners, call (310) 751-5373. Sign up to participate before May 30th and save \$10 off the registration fee. A registration form is printed on the following page for your convenience. All participants get a free t-shirt, goody bag, and a wonderful feeling from helping to prevent suicide. ♡

Why We Grieve Differently *continued from page 1*

on how we are able to handle loss in the present.

What other losses have we faced in our childhood, adolescence, adulthood? How frightening were these experiences? Was there good support? Were feelings allowed to be expressed in a secure environment? Has there been a chance to recover and heal from these earlier losses?

What other life stresses have been going on prior to this recent loss? Has there been a move to a new area? Were there financial difficulties, problems or illness with another member of the family or with oneself?

What has our previous mental health history been like? Have we had bouts with depression? Have we harbored suicidal thoughts? Have we experienced a nervous breakdown? Have we been treated with medication or been hospitalized?

How has our family and cultural influences conditioned us to respond to loss and the emotions of grief (stoic father, emotional mother, etc.)?

Relationship With the Deceased

No outsider is able to determine the special bond that connects two people, regardless of the relationship, role or length of time the relationship has been in existence.

Our relationship with the deceased has a great deal to do with the intensity and duration of our grief. What was that relationship? Was the deceased a spouse? A child? A parent? A friend? A sibling? How strong was the attachment to the deceased? Was it a close, dependent relationship, or intermittent and independent? What was the degree of ambivalence (the love/hate balance) in that relationship?

It is not only the person, but also the role that person played in our life which is lost. How major was that role? Was that person the sole breadwinner, the driver, the handler of financial matters? The only one who could fix a decent

dinner? Was that person a main emotional support, an only friend? How dependent were we on the role that person filled?

Circumstances Surrounding the Death

The circumstances surrounding the death are extremely important in determining how we are going to come to an acceptance of the loss. Was order thrown into chaos, as when a parent lives to see a child die? Do we feel that this death could have been prevented or forestalled? How much responsibility am I taking for this death? How much was left unsaid or undone between ourselves and the deceased? Does the extent of unfinished business foster a feeling of guilt?

Influences in the Present

We have looked at the past, at the relationship, and how the loss occurred. Now we see how the influences in the present can impact how we are finally going to come to terms with a current loss. Can our life be rebuilt again? What opportunities does life offer now? Is health a problem? What are the secondary losses that are the result of this death? Loss of income? Home? Family breakup? What other stresses or crises are present?

Our personality, present stability of mental health, and coping behavior play a significant role in our response to the loss. What kind of role expectations do we have for ourselves? What are those imposed by friends, relatives and others? Are we expected to be the "strong one" or is it alright for us to break down and have someone else take care of us?

What is there in our social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that give us strength and comfort? What role do rituals play in our recovery? Do our religious or philosophical beliefs bring comfort or add sorrow and guilt? What kind of social support is there in our lives during this emotional upheaval?

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

- Jack Albe** from Virginia Albe
- Gene Allison** from Lynn and Scott Hopkins
- Dan Appelbaum** from Carol Anne and Scott Newman
- Frederick Figueroa** from M. Elizabeth Singer
- Michael Flores, Jr.** from Heather Flores
- Daniel Gallin** from Linda Carson
- Constance Jays** from Marcia Brown Kelly
- Patrick Laden** from Marilyn Laden
- Michael Marangon** from Mary Zona Marangon
- Gilbert Medina** from Riana Benton
- Douglas Roman Segura** from Irma and Donald Segura
- Sherry**, sister of Lisa Buch, from Phyllis Schwarz
- Jerri Taylor** from John Allen, Wendy and Silverio Arano, Robin Berkovitz,

Susan L. Bloom, John Brock, Victoria Chaney-Brosman, Patrick Crawford, Nancy and Harold Gast, Stacy Griffith, Joan Guido, June Guinan, Paul Hamby, Marvin Isaacson, Natasha Khamashta, Gil Mares, Bill Hoffman, Kendi Ravsten, LA County Latino Public Defenders Association, Mearl Lottman, Stanley Sho and Jane Shimotsu, Cynthia Sidhu, Robert Rodgers, Andrew Dao, Marcus Leon, Judy French, Albert Iew and Jason Thong, Beth Van Arnam-Widmark, Mark Zuckman

Drew Wickline from James and Barbara Wickline

IN HONOR OF:

- Lois and Sam Bloom** from Mr. and Mrs. Gerald H. Weyrauch
- Norman Farberow** from Carmel Winkler
- Heidi Owen** from Dr. Harold Owen

MAY

The first week of May is National Suicide Prevention Week.

JULY 14 - 16

SPAN-USA: Congressional Awareness Event and State Planners Meeting

Join other survivors from all over the United States for the Annual Suicide Prevention Advocacy letter delivery to Capitol Hill. All State's Quilt Display. For information see: www.spanusa.org.

JULY 25 - 28

2nd Annual Yellow Ribbon Conference

This conference is for adults and youth, and will be held in Westminster, Colorado. Faces of Suicide quilts to be displayed. For information see: www.yellowribbon.org

AUGUST 3 - SEPTEMBER 29

Art Heals, Art Works

At the Fullerton Museum Center, Fullerton, CA. Sixteen artists with the common need to express and recover from trauma display their works. The exhibit is organized by guest artist-curator, Janice DeLoof. See the museum's website for information about upcoming events, lectures and workshops. www.ci.fullerton.ca.us/museum

AUGUST 17 - 18

Out of the Darkness

A 26-mile overnight walk for suicide prevention from Fairfax, VA to Washington, DC. Call 1.800.825.1000 or visit www.BeThePeople.com

AUGUST 23 - 24

Partners in Recovery

NAMI California Conference 2002. Details will be posted soon on NAMI's website: ca.nami.org

SEPTEMBER 22

Alive & Running 5K/10K Walk/Run

Didi Hirsch's annual race to benefit the Suicide Prevention Center. See the early registration form on the previous page.

SYMPTOMS OF MAJOR DEPRESSION

Persistently sad mood or absence of emotions.

Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, guilt, pessimism or worthlessness.

Substance abuse.

Fatigue or loss of interest in ordinary activities.

Changes in sleep patterns. Irritability or outbursts of anger.

Thoughts of death or suicide, or attempts to commit suicide.



Important Phone Numbers and Resources

HELP LINES

Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line:
Toll free in LA County: 1.877.727.4747

Suicide Prevention Center Crisis Line:
Outside LA County: 1.310.391.1253

Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center:
1.310.390.6612

Trevor Helpline (Suicide Hotline for gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning youth): 1.800.850.8078

National Suicide Prevention Crisis Line: 1.800.SUICIDE
(800.784.2433), 24 hrs., connects with local certified help

RESOURCES

AAS — American Association of Suicidology (professional training/education/research/prevent/survivors): 1.202.237.2280, www.suicidology.org

AFSP — American Foundation/Suicide Prevention (research & education): www.afsp.org, 1.888.333.2377

Compassionate Friends/South Bay, LA: 1.310.368.6845

Compassionate Friends, Inc. (parents grief): 1.630.990.0010
www.compassionatefriends.org — chat room 10am-11:00 pm

NAMI — National Alliance for Mentally Ill:
www.nami.org 1.800.950.6264

NAMI-California: ca.nami.org, 1.916.567.0163

NOPCAS — National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide, Dr. Barnsi: 1.512.245.8453

SPAN-USA — Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network:
www.spanusa.org, 1.888.649.1366

SPAN-California: 1.310.377.8857

SAVE — Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education (depression and suicide information): www.save.org

The Surgeon General's Call to Action 1999, download from:
www.spanusa.org

Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Project, Light for Life International: www.yellowribbon.org, 1.303.429.3530

INTERNET SUPPORT

www.suicidepreventioncenter.org: OUR WEBSITE, Survivors After Suicide Newsletter, current issue

www.friendsforsurvival.org: Friends for Survival, Inc., Sacramento, CA

www.webhealing.com: articles of interest

www.griefnet.org: grief support; a system that can connect you with various resources

www.1000deaths.com: SOLOS survivor support and suicide prevention

www.onelist.com/subscribe/parentsof suicides: support for parents of suicides

www.geocities.com/Heartland/Hills/9689: L.A.R.G.O., Life After Repeated Grief: Options (Sascha Wagner)

www.twotoomany.com: SAS Editor's website, lost two brothers to suicide

www.spanusa.org: helplines, prevention information and resources for mental health, etc.

www.beforetheirtime.org: a musical resource to provide comfort to people after the death of someone close

www.siblingsurvivors.com: Michelle Linn-Gust's website

www.survivorsof suicide.com: a website dedicated to those who have lost a loved one to suicide

www.nameastar.net: Name a Star's Memorial Star™ can be given as a memorial in remembrance of a loved one

Research with Survivors of Suicide

Have you lost a family member to suicide? I am a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Loma Linda University, and I am conducting research on Survivors of Suicide (family or friends who have lost a loved one to suicide). I am also a survivor of two suicides of family members. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the many ways a suicide may impact family members. I am hopeful that my study will help non-survivors to better understand the social and psychological consequences of suicide for family and friends.

If you are interested in this research, your voluntary participation is requested. Participation will be anonymous and results will remain confidential. Statistical analysis will be based on group results and will be reported in grouped format only. Participation entails completing a survey of approximately 150 questions about your thoughts, feelings, and social experiences following the suicide of a family member.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED!!!!

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Please **CALL** Monica Hodges, M.A. at (562) 397-6294,
EMAIL mhodes@deltanet.com, or **MAIL** the request form to:
Monica Hodges, M.A., C/O Hector Betancourt, Ph.D., Loma Linda University
Graduate School, Loma Linda, CA 92350

Yes, I am interested in participating in this study. Please send me:

The entire package More information about _____

Send to: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Or call me at: _____ Best time to call: _____

Why We Grieve Differently *continued from page 4*

Conclusion

When a person who is a part of our life dies, understanding the uniqueness of this loss can guide us in finding the support we will need and to recognize when help should come from outside family or friends.

When the loss is experienced by someone we would like to help, this same understanding is essential. Thus we can guard against a temptation to compare or to judge their grief responses to our own.

Reprinted from save's (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education) website, April 2002. www.save.org

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Also include the issue date and year the article appeared. Kindly send us a copy of any reprints for our authors to the attention of Deborah Pikul, Editor. Thank you.

SAS Monthly Meetings

Everyone who has completed an eight-week Survivors After Suicide Support Group is invited to attend monthly meetings at the location listed below. There is no charge. We suggest you put this page on your refrigerator for easy reference.

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY

Kaiser Permanente Hospital, 13652 Cantara (at Woodman), Panorama City. Meetings are held on the 3rd floor in Conference Rooms 1 and 2.

2nd Saturday 11:30 am - 1:00 pm.

Meeting dates: June 8 July 13 Aug 10 Sept 14

SOUTH BAY (TORRANCE)

Little Company of Mary Hospital, Center for Health Education Building, Earl Street, Torrance. Please check the bulletin board inside door for meeting room. **3rd Monday 7:30 - 9:00 pm.**

Meeting dates: June 17 July 15 Aug 19 Sept 16

WEST LA

Didi Hirsch Culver/Palms Center, 11133 Washington Blvd., Culver City, 1 block east of Sepulveda on the north side of the street. The parking lot is in the building. Drive up to the gate and it will open outward.

3rd Wednesday 7:00 - 8:30 pm.

Meeting dates: June 19 July 17 Aug 21 Sept 18

View this newsletter online at www.suicidepreventioncenter.org. Click on Bereavement.

SURVIVORS AFTER SUICIDE NEWSLETTER

A quarterly publication of Survivors after Suicide (a support group for those who have lost a loved one to suicide), a program of the **Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health: Suicide Prevention Center**
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Mailing list changes cannot be made unless corrected or duplicate labels are mailed to SAS at the address above.

Address Correction Requested

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